

**US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE – SOUTHWEST REGION
HURRICANE RITA UPDATE AS OF September 23, 2005 – 1600 HOURS MST**

NEW ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Central Command briefings and phone calls will continue throughout the weekend and daily until further notice between the Regional Office and Field Stations at 0830 and 0900 respectively.

Oil Spill Response is being coordinated with the Coast Guard – a call is out for volunteers.

The Southwest Region's "Special Operations Response Team" – SORT is enroute to Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge near Austin. The team made up of highly skilled Refuge Law Enforcement Officers and is one of the first in the Service to be trained to respond to events beyond normal law enforcement activities. The team will be part of the Incident Command Team.

Ralph Godfrey's FWS Type-3 Incident Command Team is staging temporarily at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge is scheduled to hold its first briefing at 1900 hours this evening. Despite the impending hurricane, Balcones is reporting record high temperatures and fire danger.

Location of a Service facility to house an Incident Command Post within 48-hours of landfall has yet to be determined.

All refuges out of the direct path of the storm are reporting in daily and ready to provide support as needed. All fish hatcheries will be staffed and reachable throughout the weekend.

INTERNET ACCESS:

Anyone seeking information on Hurricane Rita may do so via these Service links:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/> <http://www.fws.gov/>

THE SOUTHWEST REGION'S HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK:

Employees can now reach the Southwest Region's Command Center's Hurricane Rita Emergency Information Desk by e-mail or text messaging at: hurricanerita@fws.gov

The Emergency Information Desk is being staffed at the Regional Office through Sunday, September 25 -- hours of operation are from 0600 to 1800 daily. Initially the Desk is serving as a centralized communications base for all affected staff and offices and following landfall serve as a resource Dispatch Center.

***HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK PHONE NUMBER:
505-248-6508**

Employees may check for pre-recorded information on the hurricane by phoning the Region's 24-Hour Emergency Phone Line at:

***24-Hour Employee Emergency Hotline: 505-248-6543**

NOTE: Any media inquiries will be handled by External Affairs: 505-248-6911

Daily updates will be completed by COB each day and press releases issued as necessary.

END OF REPORT